thicker than water from the womb

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thicker than water from the womb

by orphan_account

Summary

"He could see now that his plan of isolating Will even further, until Hannibal was the only person he could rely on was flawed. Will had been isolated all his life, and that hadn't been enough to bring out his true potential. No, if Hannibal wanted Will’s complaisance in his own unmaking he would have to offer him what he had searched for all his life. Hannibal would give him the only thing Will never thought he could have."

Instead of telling Mason about Margot's pregnancy, Hannibal decides to adopt the child once he's born and lure Will with the promise of family.

Chapter 1

Hannibal assessed Margot from across the room. Her back ramrod straight, hands clasped low beneath her waist; she was the picture of composure. He, however, knew better. Her eyes were limpid and sharp, but their gaze was unfocused as she stared out the window. Her hair, albeit expertly done up, lacked shine, and upon close inspection was thin and brittle. The bright red lipstick she favoured did little to disguise her bitten lips. Margot Verger was a woman bursting at the seams, even if she was careful to hide it from the world.

Usually, this would be of no concern to Hannibal. His patient's frazzled mental state was to be expected, they wouldn't be in need of therapy otherwise. Margot, however, presented a conundrum. Hannibal's first instinct was to unravel the seams that held her together, and, bluntly put, see what happens. His second one was to give Margot the revenge she deserved and so desperately craved. Hannibal was rarely in the spirit to right the wrongs in the world, but there was something about Margot that resonated in him. Something told him that as entertaining as it would be to watch her artful veneer crack, there was more to be gained from giving her the means to sculpt herself anew instead.

Just as he was considering how to carefully imply that it would indeed be in her best interests to kill her brother, Margot finally turned to face him, " To be honest doctor, no amount of therapy will make me stop wanting to kill Mason."

Hannibal could almost laugh; apparently there would be no need for subtlety and careful manipulation.

"I agree. And that's why I think you should kill him."

To her credit, Margot didn't seem the least bit startled by his words, even if she did arch one sensibly sculpted eyebrow before speaking again, "Do you usually advise all your patients to commit murder, Dr. Lecter?"

"Only the ones who would benefit from it, as is your case. If what you tell me about Mason is true, then he is far too powerful to ever be brought to justice, and will likely maintain his hold of you for as long as you both live. Therefore, I think you should make sure he isn't able to do it for much longer." Hannibal reclined in his seat and smoothed the lines of his pants. Margot was looking at him with open curiosity now, instead of polite disinterest.

"I must say you employ the most unconventional therapies, doctor."

"I generally have unconventional patients."

"Yes, I bet you do. "

Hannibal smiled. He took a gamble on Margot Verger welcoming his suggestion instead of questioning his conduct, and it had paid. As he expected it would, she was altogether too cynical of morality to hold it in any high regard. Even so, Hannibal was the kind of man who enjoyed being right as often as possible.

“Unfortunately, I wasn't thinking clearly when I tried to kill my brother. If I was, I would have remembered I don’t stand to inherit a thing if he dies. Only a male Verger heir can claim the throne, so to speak.”

“You could still live without your family’s money I assume.”

“I could, but it doesn't mean I want to.” The thin line of her mouth made it clear the issue wasn’t open to negotiation, Hannibal respected that. Margot didn't want to simply dispose of her brother she wanted to come out triumphant.

He also saw opportunity in her plight.

There was the matter of Will Graham and what to do with him. As much as he seemed to be changed, Hannibal still questioned his loyalty. Tier’s body laid out on his table had been a welcomed surprise as was Will’s claim that they were even. He just wasn't sure how honest Will had been at the time. He wanted to know his loyalties lied with him and him alone. Jack Crawford was still too strong a presence in Will’s life. Hannibal would see that link severed, permanently, and Margot had unknowingly given him the means to do just that.

He could see now that his plan of isolating Will even further, until Hannibal was the only person he could rely on, was flawed. Will had been isolated all his life, and that hadn't been enough to bring out his true potential. No, if Hannibal wanted Will’s complaisance in his own unmaking he would have to offer him what he had searched for all his life. Hannibal would give him the only thing Will never thought he could have.

Now it was only a matter of making Margot realise that her father, in all his appalling misogyny, had also given her the means to achieve what she wanted.

“Have you considered having children? That would certainly solve your problem.”

“No, I have no desire to, and the desires I do have seldom lead to reproduction.” Ah, a setback, but Hannibal wouldn't be deterred by matters of sexual orientation, nor Margot’s nor Will’s. A delightful irony that tasted sweet on his tongue.

“I advise you to reconsider; I understand it would be a sacrifice, but I believe it would be worth the inconvenience if it were to be the final sacrifice.” Hannibal filled his own glass with more water and took a sip, Margot looked out the window once again and didn't reply. But Hannibal could already see the idea taking shape in her mind. She had endured years of abuse at the hands of her brother, what would be a few clumsy minutes with a stranger, and nine months of discomfort compared to that.

“And what would I do with the child? I have no interest in being a mother, and I fear I would look into the child’s eyes and see my brother staring back at me,” she said walking the distance to the chair in front of his and finally taking a seat.

“Well, adoption would be the most logical option, but if you don’t mind, I would like to take custody of the child.”

“For what reason?” Her eyes tightened minutely, and Hannibal measured his next words carefully.

“I'm unable to have children myself, and I must admit at this point I’m not entirely interested in pursuing a romantic relationship with anyone, but I would like to be a father very much. Some of my best memories are of taking care of my younger sister and I would like to relive the experience. It would also be a solution to your problem, and I'm always glad to help a patient.”

“How very noble of you,” Margot’s tone implied she didn't find it noble in the least, but was willing to believe his motives. Her concern for the potential child would only go so far, after all. “The problem of the child’s gender remains, the will is clear, the heir must be male.”

“I'm friends with various former colleagues that would be glad to assist you.” They wouldn't actually, but they wouldn't be able to refuse, either way.

“In that case Dr. Lecter, this has been the most productive session. I’ll be sure to recommend you to everyone I know.” The earlier tension seemed to have drained out of her, replaced by a glint of hope in her eyes, as she accepted the hand Hannibal extended and got up from the chair.

“I’d be very thankful if you did. We shall discuss the particularities of your case next session. Let me walk you to the door.”

Hannibal checked his watch, if Will remained as punctual as ever he should already have been waiting outside for five minutes. It would be extremely inconvenient if he wasn't, but not irremediable. Fortunately there would be no need to engineer any future chance encounters between Margot and Will, as the later was pacing the waiting room when Hannibal opened the door to show Margot out.

“Ah, Will, I’m sorry to have kept you waiting, I must have lost track of time, Margot makes for very enjoyable conversation.”

“Likewise,” she said, sparing Will only a casual glance.

“Oh, how rude of me I haven’t even introduced you.”

“Will Graham, nice to meet you.” Will came forward and shook Margot’s hand before Hannibal could say anything else. He would have found the gesture rude if he wasn't delighted that Will was meeting Margot's eyes. A few months ago, Hannibal was one of the few people he felt comfortable enough to make direct eye-contact with. That alone was a testament of his progress under Hannibal’s care. If everything went according to plan, very soon there would be no one intimidating enough to make Will cower, ever again.

“Margot Verger,” she replied curtly, but this time her eyes lingered a little longer, her gaze considering.

Hannibal would see to it that Margot didn't feel the need to consider anyone else.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

I'm so sorry for taking this long to update, stuff just kept getting in the way, and I have the terrible habit of procrastinating even the things I want to do.
A big thank you to Feygan for beta reading this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The call came at 3 a.m. Will was sleeping on the couch. Winston curled around him, and the rest of the pack slept on the rug. The day had been unusually cold, and Will had lit the rarely used fireplace for a change. He'd decided to take a short nap before making himself dinner, and lulled by the warmth and the soothing sounds of crackling wood fell into a deep sleep, blissfully free of nightmares. There were only embers left in the hearth when he was roused by the shrill ring of the phone.

As he reached for the phone, he rubbed at his eyes and checked the clock perched precariously on the mantle. He very much doubted he'd be able to fall asleep again. He was expecting Jack's baritone on the other end of the line, telling Will to meet him at yet another crime scene, so it took him a moment to place the voice that greeted him

"Hello Will."

The shock that ran through his spine made his legs give out. It was fortunate that he was standing near the couch or he would have crumpled to the floor. He had hoped fervently that Hannibal's mysterious disappearance four months ago meant that the man had finally met his match, that he had finally crossed someone stronger than him and was dead somewhere. Or at the very least that he had gone into hiding, sensing the FBI closing in on him. In either scenario, Will entertained the idea that he would never have to hear the man's voice again. Rationally he'd known how unlikely it was–there wasn't a body for one thing, as would be the case if Hannibal had died of natural causes, and if another killer had hunted him there would be not only a body but an entire grisly art installation. It wasn't everyday someone murdered the Chesapeake Ripper. Will wasn't so fanciful as to believe that Hannibal would die at the hands of someone who wasn't aware of his true identity. Still, as the days went on without any trace of him, Will had allowed himself to hope. He took it as a clear sign he hadn't fully recovered from the encephalitis.

"I'm calling Jack," he finally said, once he felt he was no longer in danger of breaking into hysterics.

"I advise you not to."

“Of course you do,” Will replied, already searching his pockets for his cellphone. “But I’m politely going to tell you to fuck off.”

“Don’t be vulgar Will, you know how it bothers me.”

“That’s precisely why I do it.”

Hannibal chuckled on the other end of the line.

“What do you want, Hannibal?” Will asked. The fear and the anger drained out of him. No amount of threats could persuade Hannibal, he would say his piece, Will’s opinion notwithstanding. And as much as it angered him to admit it, Hannibal could probably sense how empty his threats were. He had let Hannibal get away with so much, he figured the other man knew that wasn’t about to change.

“I want you to meet your son.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I don’t have a son.”

“Oh, but you do. I’m holding him right now.”

Will remained silent for a few seconds, until he realised how preposterous the whole thing was. There was no way he had a son. He tried to look at the situation from Hannibal’s point of view, what exactly was his angle? If anything it seemed too farfetched, verging on harlequin romance plot, for Hannibal. There was an undercurrent of Machiavellian subtlety to everything he did. Will was loath to acknowledge how much he admired the way Hannibal’s mind worked, how much it fascinated him and made him eager to rise to the challenge, even if it meant losing everything that kept him tethered to reality in the process. But this? It was more like a soap opera’s lead mad attempt at delaying an inevitable break up by faking a pregnancy. Hannibal had to know Will would see right through it. This left Will to contemplate a chilling prospect. What if it was true?

“I don’t believe you,” he said finally, glad his voice held steady and didn’t betray his uncertainty.

“I would think less of you if you did.” Hannibal sounded pleased; it was by no means a good sign. “Fortunately, there’s someone here who can vouch for me.”

There was the unmistakable, distant crackling sound of static as the handset was passed to someone else, some muffled words in the background, and then a deep exhale. “Hi Will, it’s me…”

“Abigail,” Will said with no intonation, merely stating a fact. After thinking her dead for so long, he felt removed, a detached observer watching himself on the phone with someone who wasn’t supposed to be there. “I thought you were dead.”

“I know, I’m sorry, but Hannibal…”

“It’s not your fault, you don’t need to apologise.” He ran his fingers through his hair, it was damp, he hadn’t realised he was sweating. He took three deep breaths and tried to calm

himself. “Listen Abigail, I want you to hum if you’re safe, and sigh if you fear you might be in danger.”

“Mhmm, mhm,” her tone sounded as if she were agreeing with something he'd said. Will allowed himself to relax marginally. She was safe, or as safe as someone could be in the company of a murderous cannibal, though Hannibal was a master at making people feel at ease. Even after leaving the hospital, Will never felt threatened in Hannibal’s presence. In fact, the fear only crept in when they were apart.

“Is Hannibal telling the truth? Do I really have a son?”

“You do. His name is Mischa.”

He was speechless. All the background noise disappeared–the dogs moving about, the clock ticking away on the mantle, the faint electric buzz of the TV–it was as if his ears were filled with cotton. His vision was getting blurry, and his throat felt dry and constricted. He was having a panic attack, and at this point there was nothing much he could do about it.

“Put Hannibal on the phone.” He held onto the handset so tightly the plastic started to crack under the strain. He was going to pass out if he didn’t calm down.

“As you see Wi–” Hannibal cut off abruptly, aware of Will’s hyperventilation. “Relax Will, you just got very big news. Remember, inhale from your diaphragm and hold your breath. Good. Now exhale slowly, release the air at an even pace.”

Will did so; he repeated the breathing exercise three times, until the darkness around his field of vision receded. It pained him to admit it, but it was probably Hannibal’s level, calm voice that helped ground him, rather than the controlled breathing.

“Are you feeling better now Will?”

“Yes. At least I don’t feel like I’m about to pass out anymore,” he replied bitterly.

“I’m very sorry to have caused you undue stress, but I couldn’t keep your son’s existence from you.”

“How old is he?”

“Three weeks.”

Will did the math quickly. There was only one viable option really, but he had wanted to believe Hannibal was lying to him so strongly it hadn’t even crossed his mind until then.

“Margot Verger.”

“Yes.”

“That day in your waiting room… you planned this.”

“We have much to discuss, but I’d rather do it in person. I bought you a ticket to Paris. I believe I redirected it to the right email address. Your flight is tomorrow at nine p.m.”

Will snorted at that. “What makes you think I won’t bring Jack with me, and the whole damn FBI? You’re still a murder suspect.”

“I advise you not to. I won’t be at the airport waiting for you, neither will Abigail. I’m also Mischa’s legal guardian. Margot handed over her parental rights, and he’s officially registered as my biological son.”
Will couldn’t say he was surprised by that. But not being surprised didn’t make him any less angry. Not only was Abigail alive, but he had a son, and they were both with Hannibal. The same man who incriminated Will for his murders, fed him Abigail’s ear (oh god, her ear!), and sent an unhinged serial killer after him. He was completely overwhelmed and crushed under the weight of his helplessness.

He was determined not to let anything show, however. “A paternity test would prove I’m the biological father. You wouldn’t get to see him ever again.”

That seemed to get a reaction out of Hannibal. His tone was firmer, colder when he next spoke, “You will see us Monday, or never again. I’m afraid that’s final. Goodbye. Abigail sends her best.” He disconnected.

Will lost track of the time he spent sitting on the couch, handset cradled between his palms. The dogs whined and tried to get his attention, but he didn’t acknowledge them. He felt trapped, truly trapped, in a way he hadn’t been in the hospital, or even when they put him in that straitjacket. Never in his life had he felt so completely at the mercy of someone else: because he was. He knew already that he wouldn’t dare call Jack; he couldn’t risk it. He couldn’t walk away from Abigail and the son he hadn’t even met.
But he could try and best Hannibal at his own game. He could pick up where he left off when Hannibal disappeared and play the willing partner in crime, ripe for the picking and ready to be corrupted. He told himself he could do it, this time he even had a stronger motivation than simply turning Hannibal over to the waiting hands of Jack and the FBI.

He would try and sleep some more, and in the morning he would pack everything he could fit into his one travel bag and leave for Paris. He would need to arrange for someone to look after his dogs, Alana certainly wouldn’t mind, and he reckoned he could call Jack from a public phone at the airport and let him know he wouldn’t be consulting anymore. Better to do it from a safe distance; it would make it much harder for Jack to interfere. Or better yet, he could ask Alana to tell Jack instead. It was a cowardly move, but willingly moving to another continent to live under the same roof as Hannibal had depleted his stock of bravery.

He managed no more than two hours of fitful sleep. The mocking, disembodied voice of Garret Jacob Hobbs haunted his dreams. He would give in. It was so much easier to give in than to fight himself all the time. While Hobbs taunted him, the feathered stag stared at him from across a room. Not any room, a nursery. The pastel wallpaper peeled away from the walls, uncovering a giant ribcage that enclosed the whole area. In the center, slightly to the left, was a wicker bassinet mounted over a base of antlers. The stag, Will realised, was waiting for him to cross the distance to the crib and look inside.

The next morning Will spent no more than an hour packing. He didn't need much–a few clothes, underwear, some fishing gear he was too sentimental to leave behind, and a laptop he would carry with himself, and that was it, his life haphazardly packed in a suitcase. It gave him no small amount of pleasure picturing Hannibal's judgmental stare if he knew that Will hadn't bothered to fold anything.

He said his goodbyes to every single one of his dogs. He felt as if he was abandoning them. He could shed his life in Wolf Trap without a second thought–he wasn't particularly attached to any part of it–but his dogs were different. They needed him and loved him selflessly. Leaving them behind was a bigger betrayal than keeping Jack in the dark, or even leaving Alana to do the damage control after he left.

He took one last glance at the dogs wagging their tails at him and closed the door. He wondered if he'd ever see them again. Not likely.

He still had four hours until the flight. He didn't want to linger around the house in case he changed his mind and decided not to go; it was a real possibility. Ahead lay uncertainty, and he would much rather stay on familiar ground. He wished he could forget all about the phone call from the previous night. He had been a father for less than twenty-four hours and was already considering walking out on his son. The next eighteen years or so would be a challenge to say the least.

He got into the taxi he'd called earlier and was about to tell the driver to take him to the airport when he changed his mind. There was someone he needed to talk to in person before leaving. He told the driver the address and readied himself for a very unpleasant conversation.

A pretty redhead ushered him into the office as soon as he announced himself. The room was all austere wood paneling and dark mahogany furniture; the overall effect was dwarfing. The bookcases were packed with leather-bound tomes he suspected had never been opened. At the head of a large mahogany desk, sitting in a leather chair, was Margot Verger.

"I was expecting you," she said as soon as Will took his seat across from her. "In fact, I was expecting you yesterday when Hannibal told me he was going to call you."

"I'm sorry to disappoint. I hope you didn't stay up late waiting."

"Not at all." She smiled, a chilling caricature of a real smile, but Will still awarded her a mental A+ for effort. "I'm sure you have a lot of questions."

"Understatement."

"You must want to know why I did it."

“Not really. I already know why. Or actually, I don’t know the specifics, but something tells me it has to do with the glaring absence of your brother. This office doesn’t look like you decorated it. I assume it used to be his.” Will tried to remember if there had been something on the news about Mason Verger, but he couldn’t dredge up anything. Mason might even still be alive. Probably suffering the same kind of torture he had inflicted on his sister over the years. Either way, Will found he couldn’t care less.

“Once you’re done trying to impress me with your deduction skills, feel free to speak your mind.” Margot ran a hand over her hair and looked at her red tipped nails before meeting Will’s eyes dispassionately.

“Why give him to Hannibal? I would have taken him and asked nothing from you.”

She snorted at that, a loud, nasal laugh. “Men and their egos. You don’t understand, do you? You were nothing more than a sperm donor. Your parental rights didn't even once cross my mind. I wanted a child to achieve my goals; Hannibal wanted a child to achieve his goals. You were merely convenient.”

Will felt the urge to scream at her. He also wanted to laugh–at his situation, at her skewed perception of the world, at the fact that they were only having this conversation because Hannibal made it so. He wondered if Margot realized that she'd been manipulated just as much as Will had. If she did, she was determined to make him believe otherwise.

“You gave the Chesapeake Ripper full custody over your son.”

“Those allegations were never proven,” she said, rubbing at her temples. Margot gave him a condescending smile as if he were a particularly dense child she was forced to humour, before continuing, “Besides, if I recall, you were a suspect in the investigation as well. “

“Hannibal incriminated me.”

“How convenient. You and Hannibal could take turns swapping that excuse back and forth for all I care.”

“It doesn’t concern you that your son might be sleeping under the same roof as a murderer?”

“No, frankly it doesn’t. I have no reason to believe Hannibal will ever harm the child even if he is the Ripper. He never targeted children after all.” Margot rose from her chair and walked to the bar cart near the window and poured herself a drink. She didn’t offer Will anything. "You also seem to be forgetting that I’ve slept under the same roof as a murderer for most of my life. I became one very recently, and so did you.”

She must have meant Garret Jacob Hobbs. He wasn’t a suspect in Tier’s murder. Even so, the knowing glint in her eyes unsettled him.

“Then why not give him up for adoption?” Will was grasping at straws. Margot was tapping her fingers on the desk, expression pinched, which was as close to screaming at him to shut up and leave as she would ever get.

“This conversation will take us nowhere. I don’t regret what I did, and nothing you say will make me change my mind. But it seems you’re still trying to make up yours.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re angry Hannibal is making you leave,” she said, taking a sip from her drink.

“Of course I am. He’s making me uproot my whole life.”

“Really? Because from what little I know of you, it doesn’t seem like it was much of a life to begin with.”

“Well, it’s the one I have.” He sounded pathetic even to his own ears. Margot seemed to share his opinion.

“I have nothing else to say to you.” She turned her chair around and faced the window. “Anna will escort you out.”

He left before anyone could politely show him the door.

Will sighed in resignation, admitting defeat. There was no way the plastic chair would become more comfortable, no matter how much he shifted and turned. Besides, he suspected his discomfort had less to do with poor industrial design and the overall unpleasantness of airports, and more with the contact information blinking up at him from his cellphone screen. His thumb had hovered over the call button beside Alana’s face for what must have been a dozen times, but he had yet to make the call.

He knew he was only delaying the inevitable. As soon as he called Alana the last twenty-four hours would become a reality, solid and final, rather than something he could write off as a fever dream.

In the end, the dozing lady sitting next to Will made the decision for him, jostling him just enough to make his finger slip over the screen. He stared at the cellphone for a few seconds, but before he could decide whether to end the call or not, Alana picked up. He could hear her voice coming from the speakers, distant and tinny. Ignoring the anxious churning in the pit of his stomach, he brought the phone up to his ear.

“I’m sorry to bother you Alana, and I hope I’m not interrupting any dinner plans, but I really need to speak with you.”

“No, not at all, I was just about to heat up some leftovers,” she said. “What is it? You sound nervous.”

“It’s Hannibal, he called me yesterday,” he paused, still trying to figure out exactly how to summarize the bizarre conversation that followed. From Alana’s end of the line came only silence. Will rubbed at his eyes and figured that he really didn’t want to go through all the dirty details, the abridged version would be enough. “Abigail’s with him, and he wants me to meet them in Paris, or I’ll never see them–her–again.”

“You have to tell Jack,” she said, with all the conviction of someone who thought there was only one possible course of action.

“If I show up at the airport with anyone, he’ll take her somewhere else, only this time he won’t be disclosing a location.” He sounded more biting and sarcastic than Alana deserved, but his nerves were shot to hell, and she’d had worse. “Besides, what exactly is he guilty of? Providing her with an education? She isn’t a minor, and no one is looking for her. Other than me, you, and Jack, no one believes he’s the Chesapeake Ripper. The FBI will never issue an international search warrant.”

“You’re not looking at the situation rationally. There’s more we can do. We can bring her back, Will.” Alana sounded so earnest, Will almost considered telling her the truth. But no, that would only make things more difficult. She’d fight him even harder to take legal action and get the FBI involved. There was also the matter of her previous relationship with Hannibal–Will wanted to stay well away from that snake’s nest.

“I can tell when I've been given an ultimatum. Hannibal left no room for negotiation. I'm already at the airport. I'm going. I trust you’ll tell Jack. I don’t have the courage to do it myself.”

“Will, don’t board. I’m going over there, we’ll talk this over.” There was a sound of rustling fabric in the background and the distinct jingle of keys. “Please, we can talk this through.”

“It’s over, Alana, I made my decision. I’m sorry. Please look after the dogs.” All around him people were making their way to the gates, smiling flight attendants checking their tickets and IDs one last time. “I’ll email you once I land. We’ll be in touch. Goodbye.” He disconnected, cutting off her pleas.

Time to take the leap.

Chapter End Notes

There wasn't much going on in this chapter but it was a necessary evil. The next one will be, hopefully, a bit more exciting. I have a tumblr too if anyone is interested.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!